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ABSTRACT

This document is designed to provide enough information for technical colleges and similar institutions to conduct their own focus visits. A focus visit is defined as a full-day activity that takes place on the campus during which a team of 10-25 individuals (program faculty, former and current students, technical college staff, advisory committee members, and employers) develops a concise, realistic plan for improving the program and solving problems related to its operation. The report discusses the historical development of focus visits, the institutional assessment preceding a focus visit, preparation for the focus visit, and the program improvement team. It describes the following parts of focus visit: the welcome with explanation of the purpose and background information on the program being examined, discussion of possible issues, tour and assessment of the program's facilities, formation of workgroups, the two workgroup meetings to identify needs of the program and to develop solutions to meet the most important needs, a student forum to allow students to speak candidly about what they like and dislike about the program, meeting of the entire program improvement team for a large-discussion, and evaluation of the focus visit by each team member. The report also offers suggestions for following through with the focus visit and provides reasons for their success. (Appendixes include sample agendas, lists of potential issues for workgroups, and sample forms.) (YLB)

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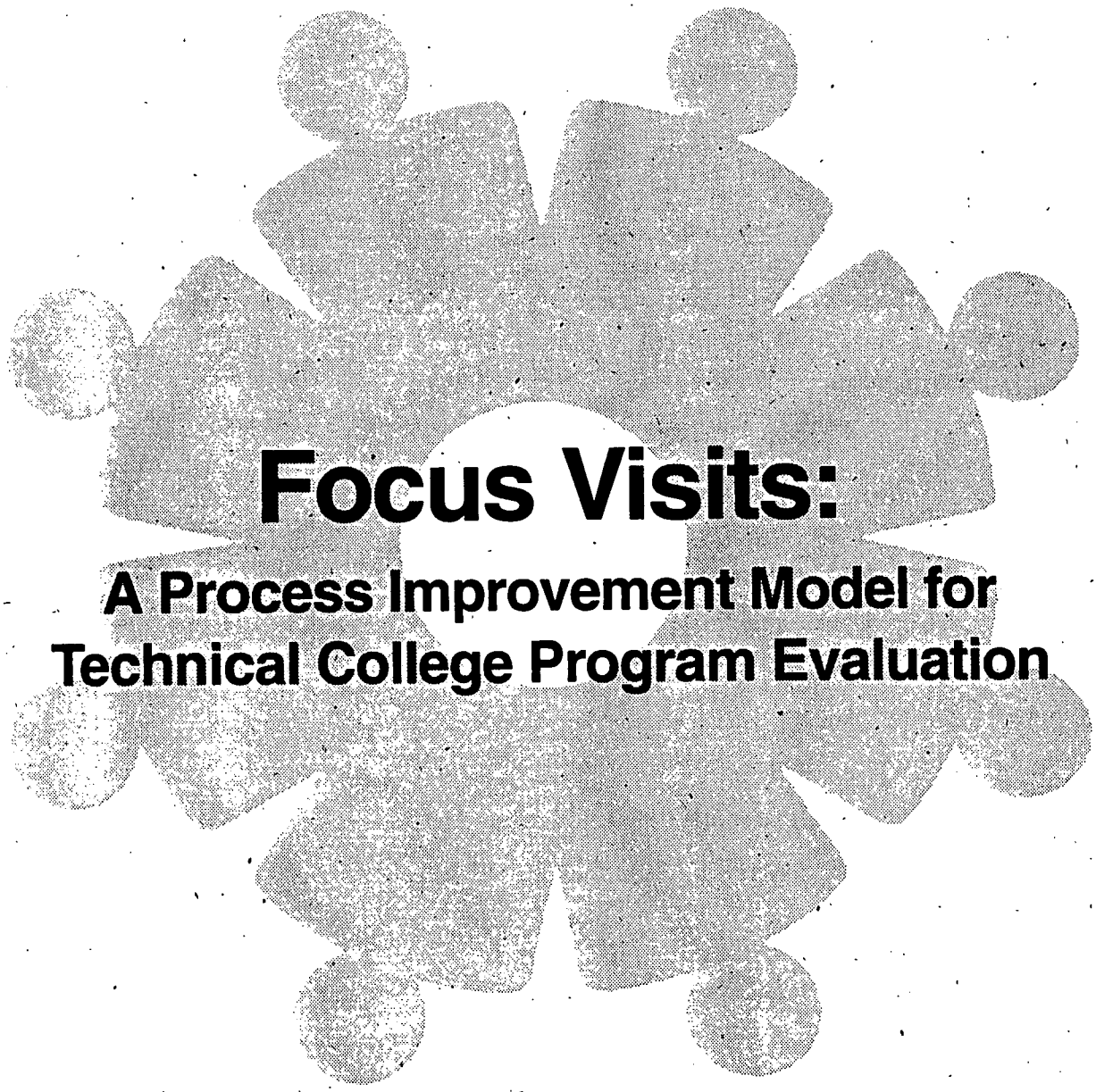

# Focus Visits:

## A Process Improvement Model for Technical College Program Evaluation

CE 073 578

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# Focus Visits:

## A Process Improvement Model for Technical College Program Evaluation

November 1996

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# Introduction

In 1993, Minnesota's State Board of Technical Colleges (SBTC) implemented a new process, known as focus visits, for evaluating and improving technical college programs. A focus visit is a full-day activity that takes place on the technical college campus which houses the program being evaluated. A team of ten to twenty-five people familiar with the program (i.e., program faculty, former students, current students, technical college staff, advisory committee members, and employers) develops a concise, realistic plan for improving the program and solving problems related to its operation.

Focus visits are much more than one-day events, however. They are both a process and a way of thinking. Focus visits are a process because the work happening before and after the actual one-day events are on-going and every bit as important as the events. They are a way of thinking because the values and beliefs undergirding this process are critical to their success. Going through the motions of a focus visit without embracing these values and beliefs is likely to yield few positive results.

> ***"My strongest impression of the focus visits I attended is that they were so positive. Often, anything related to evaluation tends to be a negative experience, but focus visits were perceived by the faculty who participated in them to be a really positive experience."***
>
> **Debbie Drinkard Grovum**
> **Counselor**
> **Northwest Technical College**
> **Bemidji Campus**

The focus visit process has been very well received by technical college faculty, administrators, staff, and students. Furthermore, the SBTC and other state agencies concluded that this process is exceptionally effective as a means for improving technical college programs. Several vulnerable programs have been revitalized and restored to success as a result of focus visits. For example, the Computer Careers program at Dakota County Technical College was suffering from low enrollment and low placement. During a focus visit, representatives from business and industry noted that the curriculum and equipment for the program were seriously outdated and recommended that the college administrators address these issues. The college acted upon these recommendations. Today the problems with placement have disappeared, and the program is filled to capacity. The college is planning to expand the program in the fall of 1996.

Focus visits are built on a process improvement model of evaluation instead of a compliance monitoring model. The purpose of focus visits is **not** to find the weaknesses of programs and document them. Rather, it is to find new and creative ways of improving programs. Focus visits are intended to be non-threatening. They are also designed to give the people most intimately connected with the

> *"Focus visits cover a wide range of services and provide for an evaluation that brings about change. The feedback received from students and employees is the strength of the process. Many excellent changes have been initiated through focus visits."*
>
> **Dr. Vern Treat**
> **Dean of Student Affairs**
> **Northwest Technical College**
> **Bemidji Campus**

program—the faculty, students, and potential employers—the greatest amount of input, as well as a major share of control over the process and outcomes of the focus visit.

The purpose of this report is to capture the historical development of focus visits and document the way they are conducted. One of the primary goals of this document is to provide enough information for technical colleges and similar institutions to conduct their own focus visits. Another goal is to illuminate the key factors which have made this process so successful. It is the hope of the State Council on Vocational Technical Education that focus visits will continue to be conducted throughout our state's technical colleges and the use of this process will be extended to include Minnesota's community colleges and state universities. Furthermore, it is the desire of the State Council that the spirit of the focus visit process prevail and permeate the continuous improvement efforts of postsecondary education for all Minnesotans.

It is important for the authors of this report to note that, during the time this report was being prepared, the technical college system in Minnesota merged with the community college system and the state university system. The combined system is known as Minnesota State Colleges and Universities (MnSCU). Although the focus visit process was developed under the SBTC, focus visits are now under the direction of MnSCU.

## Historical Development

In 1973, the United States Department of Education authorized the State Board of Technical Colleges (SBTC) to be the agency responsible for accrediting Minnesota's technical colleges. The SBTC developed a comprehensive and rigorous accreditation procedure which included three components: an institutional self-study, an on-site visit conducted by a team of qualified evaluators, and an institutional improvement plan for monitoring corrective action. Each technical college was reviewed for accreditation once every five years using this procedure. One year prior to its scheduled on-site visit, each institution completed a self-study—identifying the strengths and weaknesses of each program, as well as those of the school's administration. The on-site visits typically lasted three to four days, and the evaluation teams involved upwards of 100 people (Wood, 1995). The institutional improvement plans developed from the on-site visits were typically between 200 and 1000 pages in length. In short, these on-site visits and the resulting institutional improvement plans could be described as immense and daunting. The on-site visits

obviously required tremendous state and local resources and often proved to be a distraction to the institution's faculty, staff, and students. The institutional improvement plans contained an overwhelming amount of information of intimidating specificity. Consequently, this process sometimes resulted in little institutional change.

Beginning in 1993, focus visits replaced on-site visits as the primary means of evaluating individual technical college programs. Several factors served as the impetus for this shift. First, Minnesota's technical colleges have gradually undergone the process of becoming accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA). Today, all but four of Minnesota's technical college campuses have received NCA accreditation. The process of receiving NCA accreditation is, in many ways, similar to the old SBTC accreditation process. However, one major difference is that the NCA accreditation process focuses on entire institutions, not individual programs. Focus visits were designed to provide a mechanism for the evaluation and improvement of individual technical colleges programs. As such, focus visits are an excellent complement to the NCA accreditation process.

Another impetus for the development of the focus visit process was to reduce the amount of state and local resources required to implement on-site visits. Provision of food and housing for up to 100 people is quite costly, and managing the logistics of meetings, interviews, and campus tours for that number of people requires a major investment of staff time. Focus visits were designed to do just what their name implies—**focus**. Instead of examining each program at a technical college, focus visits can be used to examine the two or three programs most in need of help. Furthermore, instead of creating copious reports, focus visits were designed to identify the most salient issues, develop creative solutions, and report only on those.

During the same period the focus visit process was being developed, there were two other processes under development at the SBTC which impacted the evolution of the focus visit process. The first of these was the development by the SBTC of a model for identifying programs that were not performing adequately. This process became known as the *program review model.* The SBTC established performance standards in several areas. If a program fell below these minimum standards it was reviewed by the SBTC and was subject to the potential loss of its state funding. The criteria used by the SBTC for the program review model were eventually organized into two sets of standards known as the *mission test* and the *efficiency test.* Review of the results of the mission and efficiency tests are the starting points for the focus visit process. The criteria used for

***"Focus visits have been successful due to the inclusion of a variety of individuals and stakeholders in an open, frank discussion of pertinent issues. Also, the process, by design, produces achievable goals."***

**Tom Girtz**
**Dean of Curriculum**
**Red Wing/Winona Technical College**

these tests are part of the institutional assessment which precedes a focus visit. This institutional assessment is discussed in the next section of this report.

> ***"Everyone in our building is supportive of the focus visit process. I don't know of one nay-sayer."***
>
> **Dr. Jerry J. Johnson**
> **Dean of Instruction**
> **Dakota County Technical College**

The second process which impacted the evolution of focus visits was the development of standards and measures in accordance with the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Act of 1990. In order to fulfill the mandates of the Perkins Act the SBTC developed a list of ten standards and measures to be used as benchmarks of quality for technical college programs. These standards and measures eventually became known as the *effectiveness test*. The effectiveness test also has become incorporated into the institutional assessment preceding a focus visit. The major forces and events which shaped the focus visit process are summarized in Figure 1 on page five.

The first focus visit was conducted for the Surgical Technician program at Duluth Technical College in April, 1993. Using feedback from the focus visit participants, the process was revised. An additional 16 focus visits were conducted during the 1993-94 school year (SBTC, 1994). Today, the focus visit process is still being improved based on feedback from focus visit participants.

## The Institutional Assessment Preceding a Focus Visit

Although focus visits are not intended to examine every program at a technical college, the process of selecting the two or three programs which do receive focus visits involves an annual institution-wide assessment of every program at the college. This assessment has proven to be a valuable and fruitful starting point for the focus visit process.

The decisions concerning which technical college programs receive focus visits are not made at the state level. Rather, those decisions are made locally by the colleges as a result of their institutional assessments. An emphasis on local control is one of the key themes characterizing the focus visit process. This emphasis is perceived to be one of the primary reasons for the success of focus visits.

The institutional assessment used to determine which programs will receive focus visits begins by having each college select a focus visit coordinator. The focus visit coordinator is frequently a vice-president or dean of instruction. The coordinator's first task is to convene a focus visit committee consisting of a representative group of staff members. This committee could be an existing committee, such as a quality committee or an institutional effectiveness committee, or it could be an ad hoc committee created specifically for the focus visit process

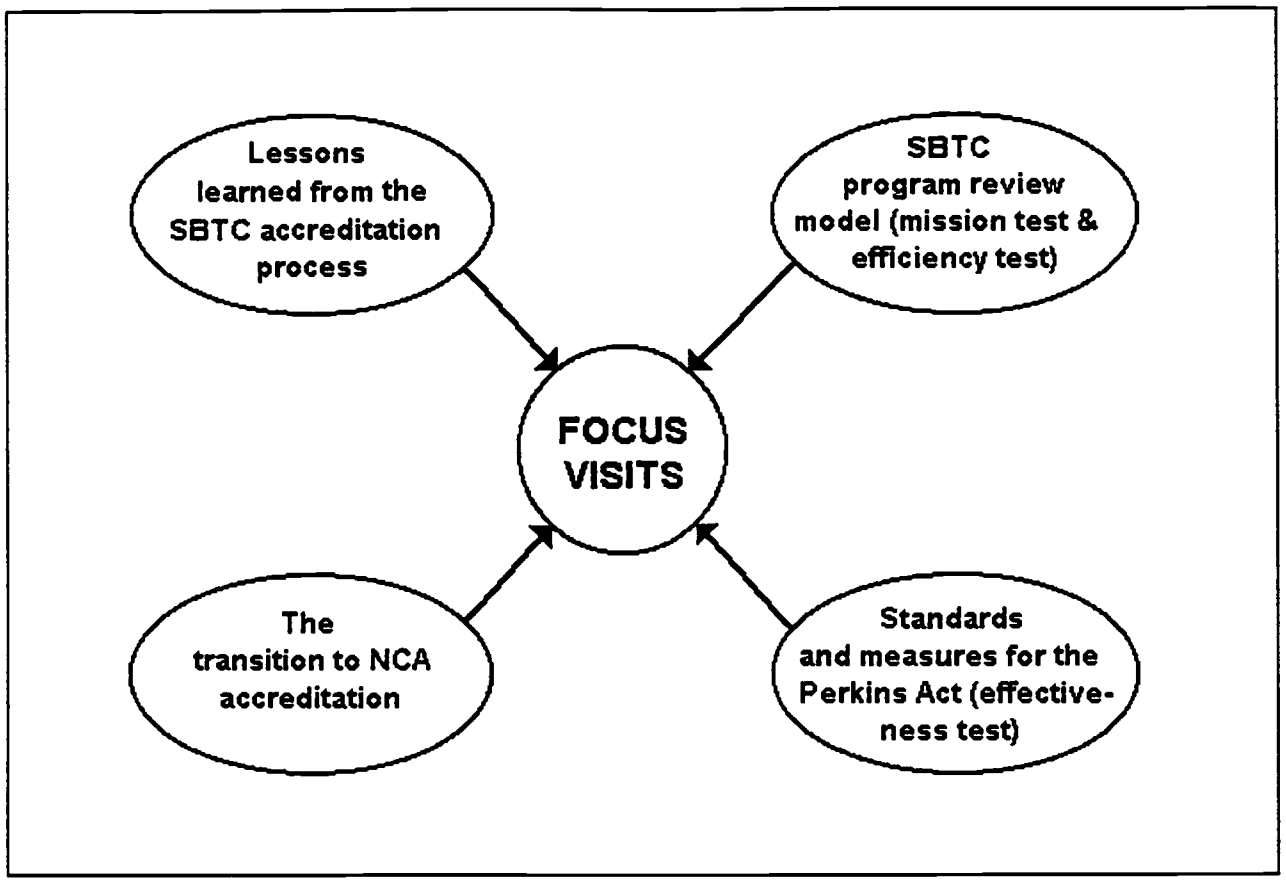


**Figure 1: Major Forces and Events which Shaped the Focus Visit Process**

(Grovum, 1995). It is the job of this committee to conduct the institution-wide assessment and recommend programs to receive focus visits.

Each focus visit committee develops a rating system for conducting the institutional assessment. This system is based on data routinely collected by the SBTC. Although these data are collected at the state level, it is up to the individual technical colleges to determine which data are used and how they are weighted. Hence, the decisions about which programs are selected for focus visits are ultimately made at the local level. The data used for these decisions can be organized according to three somewhat overlapping categories. These categories are what the SBTC referred to as: (a) the mission test, (b) the efficiency test, and (c) the effectiveness test.

The mission of the technical college system is to provide education for employment (SBTC, 1993). The mission test is an examination of the job placement rate of a program's graduates to determine how effectively that program is carrying out its mission. The SBTC established a minimum standard for placement which asserts that a technical college program is subject for review and possible termination

of state funding if placement of its graduates in related employment falls below 60% for two consecutive years (SBTC, 1993).

The efficiency test consists of seven measures (SBTC, 1993). Each of these measures is related to how efficiently money is used to support a given technical college program. These measures were developed by the SBTC to provide accountability to the people of Minnesota for the use of their public funds for technical college education. The seven efficiency measures are:

1. **Number of declared majors in the program.**

2. **Number of graduates per FTE** (full-time equivalent). One FTE is the equivalent of one full-time staff member. For example, two half-time instructors equal one FTE.

3. **FYE (fiscal-year equivalent)/FTE ratio.** This ratio produces a standardized figure for the program's student/teacher ratio. One FYE is the equivalent of one full-time student. For example, two quarter-time students and one half-time student who are in a program for one full academic year added together make one FYE. In the technical colleges, one FYE is equivalent to 45 quarter credits per year.

4. **Net expenditure per FYE.** This figure indicates how much it costs to put one FYE student through the program.

5. **Number of available graduates per number of graduates.** This figure indicates the percentage of graduates from a program who are available for immediate employment in their fields. Not all students who graduate from a program enter the job market immediately. Graduates are considered unavailable for employment if they are:
   a) pursuing further education,
   b) deceased,
   c) incarcerated,
   d) awaiting licensure or certification,
   e) unable to work because of a medical condition,
   f) serving in the military,
   g) engaged in personal enrichment activities,
   h) placed in unrelated work by choice,
   I) unwilling to accept employment,
   j) unwilling to relocate, or
   k) their status is unknown.

6. **Percent of graduates placed in related employment.** This figure indicates the percentage of available graduates (as described above) who are currently working in positions related to their field of study.

*"Focus visits have established Minnesota as a leading state in developing efficiency and effectiveness measures for educational programs."*

**Gene Christiaansen**
**Dean of Continuing Education**
**Lake Superior College**

7. **Distance to a similar program.** This figure measures the distance to the nearest technical college offering a similar program.

The effectiveness test consists of ten measures (SBTC, 1992). The effectiveness measures are related to the overall quality and equity of technical college programs. These measures were developed to fulfill the planning and evaluation requirements of the Carl D. Perkins Vocational and Applied Technology Education Act of 1990. Some of these measures pertain to technical colleges as a whole, while others pertain to individual programs within technical colleges. The emphasis on special populations in the effectiveness test is consistent with the goals and objectives of the Carl D. Perkins Act. The ten effectiveness measures are:

1. **The number and percent of students from special populations enrolled in the technical college.** These figures are compared to regional population data to determine the extent to which the college is serving the special populations in its area.

2. **The number and percent of students from special populations enrolled by technical college program.** Once again, these figures are compared to regional population data.

3. **Graduate satisfaction.** A random sample of program graduates are surveyed. Survey participants are asked to respond to two statements using a four-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The two statements are:
   a) My technical college training was important for getting my job.
   b) I am satisfied with the training I received.

   The graduate satisfaction measure is calculated by dividing the number of respondents who strongly agreed or agreed by the total number of respondents. This measure is calculated for the entire technical college and for the following special population categories within the college: handicapped, limited English proficiency, minorities, and gender.

4. **Related employment and related employment by special populations.** This measure is calculated using the following formula:

$$\frac{\text{Number of graduates in related employment}}{\text{Total number of graduates} - \text{Number of graduates unavailable for employment}}$$

A list of the conditions used to determine unavailability for employment are listed under efficiency measure number five on page six.

5. **Related employment by special populations.** This measure is based on the same formula as effectiveness measure number four above, but is calculated for the following special populations: handicapped, limited English proficiency, minorities, and gender.

6. **Retention.** Retention (or lack thereof) is measured in four different ways. These are:
   a) The percentage of newly enrolled students in a program who dropped out during the first 25% (usually 15 days) of the academic period (usually a quarter).
   b) The percentage of newly enrolled students who were still enrolled after the first 25% of the academic period, but dropped out before the end of the period.
   c) The percentage of students in a declared-major program who have not registered for at least one credit in their major program for two subsequent periods within the same fiscal year, excluding summer periods.
   d) The percentage of students in a declared-major program who have not registered for at least one credit during the fiscal year following the year of their enrollment.

7. **Occupational competencies as validated by business and industry.**

8. **Graduate grades.**

9. **Graduate grades by special populations.**

10. **Pretest/post-test gains.** Changes, if any, in academic achievement as measured by a standardized test.

The mission, efficiency, and effectiveness tests are summarized in Table 1 on page nine. In the words of the SBTC, "The mission test determines whether we are doing the *right things*. The efficiency and effectiveness tests measure whether we are doing *things right*" (SBTC, 1993, p. 2). In addition to using these data to assess the mission, effectiveness, and efficiency of technical college programs for possible program review at the state level, the SBTC identified those programs scoring in the top five percent among similar programs and publicly celebrates these *Blue Ribbon Programs*.

In conducting the institutional assessment, the focus visit committee at each technical college determines which measures the college will use. They also develop a weighted system for the measures so that a composite score can be calculated for each program at their college. Although each technical college has the freedom to develop its own unique system for assigning relative weights to the measures, it is important to note that within each college the same weighted system is applied to all programs. For example, it is acceptable that St. Cloud Technical College's weighted system is completely different from the system at Dakota County Technical College,

but it would not be acceptable for Dakota County Technical College to use one weighted system to evaluate one program or set of programs and a different system to evaluate other programs.

Once the focus visit committee has established the system for assigning relative weights to the measures, they present their system to the full faculty for approval. Once the faculty adopts the system, composite scores reflecting the weighted measures are calculated for each program and the two or three programs with the lowest scores are selected for focus visits.

**Table 1: Summary of the Mission, Efficiency, and Effectiveness Tests**

| Measure | Mission Test | Efficiency Test | Effectiveness Test |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Placement rate | √ | √ | √ |
| 2. Placement rate for special populations | | | √ |
| 3. Number of declared majors | | √ | |
| 4. FYE/FTE ratio (student/teacher ratio) | | √ | |
| 5. Number of graduates per FTE | | √ | |
| 6. Net expenditure per FYE | | √ | |
| 7. Graduates available for employment | | √ | |
| 8. Distance to a similar program | | √ | |
| 9. Special populations for the college | | | √ |
| 10. Special populations for the program | | | √ |
| 11. Graduate satisfaction | | | √ |
| 12. Retention | | | √ |
| 13. Occupational competencies | | | √ |
| 14. Grades | | | √ |
| 15. Grades for special populations | | | √ |
| 16. Pretest/post-test gains | | | √ |
| TOTAL NUMBER OF MEASURES | 1 | 7 | 10 |

During the pilot focus visit conducted at Duluth Technical College, the college voted to keep the selection process simple. They used just three measures to select the program for the first-ever focus visit and assigned the following weights to them: 65% for placement rate, 30% for student retention, and 5% for percentage of special populations enrolled in the program (SBTC, 1992). In hindsight, Duluth Technical College concluded that assigning placement so heavy a weight was not a good idea.

This disproportionate weight made the impact of other measures practically insignificant. Today Duluth Technical College uses a total of eight measures of roughly equivalent weights for their institutional assessments.

Although the institutional assessment is used to select the two or three programs to receive focus visits, the entire institution benefits from this process. First of all, the process for determining how to weight the measures gives faculty an opportunity to wrestle with what they value as an institution. Secondly, since composite scores are calculated for each program, every program receives valuable feedback on its strengths and weaknesses, whether or not it is selected for a focus visit.

Some technical colleges, such as Dakota County Technical College, have found that it is insufficient to rely completely on quantitative measures for determining which programs should receive focus visits. For example, some programs require very expensive equipment, resulting in an extremely high cost per student. If net expenditure per FYE is assigned a heavy weight, those programs would receive unusually low composite scores. To compensate for the limitations of using quantitative measures, Dakota County Technical College has developed a two-phase system for selecting programs for a focus visit. The focus visit committee at Dakota County uses quantitative measures to identify the five to ten programs most in need of help. The focus visit committee then reviews each of these programs, using a combination of qualitative and quantitative measures as a basis for its selection of the two or three programs to receive focus visits.

In at least one case, program faculty volunteered their program for a focus visit even though there were other programs at their technical college with lower composite scores on the institutional assessment. They did this because the instructors saw value in participating in a focus visit, and they were eager to improve their program. This example, along with the selection process at Dakota County Technical College described above, demonstrates the breadth of scope of the focus visit process, especially when compared to the program review model described on page three. Figure 2 (below) illustrates this difference in scope.

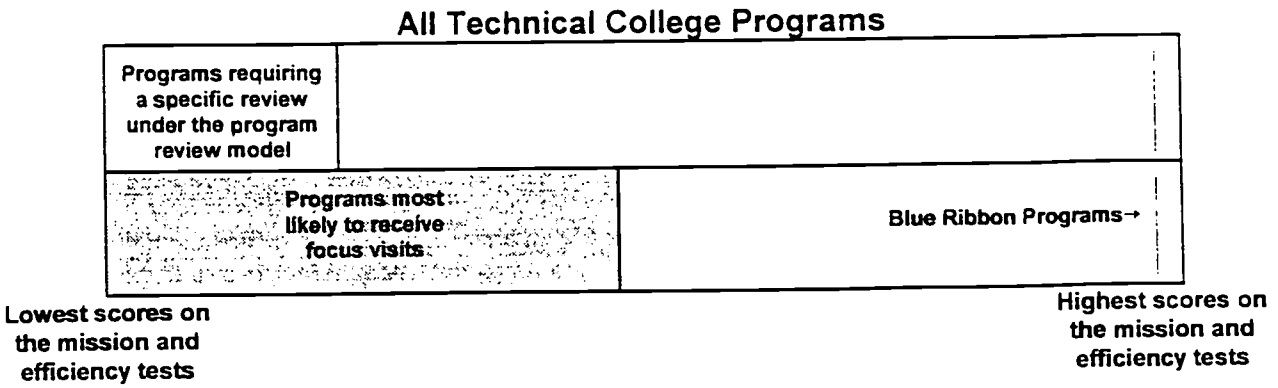


Figure 2: The Scope of the Focus Visit Process

The intention of the program review model is to identify those programs which, due to their low scores on the mission and efficiency tests, need a specific review by the State Board of Technical Colleges to determine whether the SBTC will decline further state funding of these programs. Data are collected for all technical college programs, and each program receives feedback on its performance; however, only those programs perceived to have serious problems are subject to specific review by the SBTC.

The purpose of focus visits is not to shut programs down or justify their termination, but to find creative ways of improving them. As a result, the focus visit process encompasses a broader range of programs. It is understood that even the best programs can be improved; therefore, every program could benefit from a focus visit. Yet given the resources required to conduct a focus visit, it is unrealistic to presume that any technical college should conduct more than two or three focus visits per year. Therefore, while the scope of the focus visit process is potentially much broader than the program review model, an effort is made to concentrate on the programs which need the most help and consequently could benefit most from a focus visit.

## Preparing for the Focus Visit

When the focus visit selection process has been completed, tentative dates for each focus visit are established. Roughly 45-60 days prior to the focus visit, a representative from the SBTC (now MnSCU) meets with the focus visit coordinator and the faculty members of the program which will be receiving the focus visit. The purpose of this preliminary meeting is to explain the goals of focus visits and the processes involved in conducting them. This meeting is critical because it sets the tone for the focus visit and hopefully puts the faculty at ease. The meeting helps the faculty see that the purpose of focus visits is truly program improvement—not compliance monitoring. If successful, this meeting will convince faculty that the focus visit is intended to help maintain the viability of their program, not to shut it down.

> ***"In all honesty, I can't express how much our focus visit helped us. It helped us develop a plan to improve our enrollments. We already have ten people enrolled for next year's class. Last year at this time we only had three."***
>
> **Ron Furchner**
> **Instructor**
> **Body Service Educational Program**
> **Dakota County Technical College**

After the instructors have had an opportunity to discuss their questions and concerns and express their feelings concerning the focus visit goals and processes, the faculty and SBTC staff member begin forming the program improvement team that will actually conduct the focus visit. This team typically consists of ten to twenty-five members. The SBTC staff member helps the faculty to identify possible team members, but the final decisions about who will be invited to participate on the team are made by

the program faculty and the technical college's focus visit coordinator. The composition of a typical program improvement team is described in the next section.

It should be noted that prior to most focus visits the interactions between SBTC staff, the focus visit coordinator, and the program faculty go far beyond the meeting described above. Before and after this meeting there are often multiple phone calls and personal interactions regarding the upcoming focus visit. The opportunity for on-going communication is vital to the success of a focus visit. In some cases additional meetings are scheduled between the SBTC staff, the focus visit coordinator, and the program faculty.

## The Program Improvement Team

The program improvement team for a focus visit consists of up to twenty-five people. This team may include:

a) the faculty from the particular program being evaluated;
b) up to four instructors who teach in similar programs at other institutions;
c) the technical college's focus visit coordinator (usually the Vice President or the Dean of Instruction) as well as other college staff and administrators representing areas such as student services, special needs, and placement;
d) up to four staff and/or administrators from other technical colleges;
e) a staff member from the SBTC who serves as the moderator for the focus visit;
f) a representative from the State Council on Vocational Technical Education;
g) up to four current students;
h) up to four recent graduates from the program;
i) up to four members of the program's advisory committee; and
j) up to four employers who have hired graduates from the program being evaluated.

> ***"I would like to see the focus visit process continued because it's good for programs to have someone from the outside come in and take a look at them and offer some suggestions, some fresh ideas, and some new approaches."***
>
> **Bill TeVogt**
> **Carpentry Instructor**
> **Hennepin Technical College**
> **Brooklyn Park Campus**

After the program faculty have identified those persons to be invited to serve on the program improvement team, it is typically the job of the SBTC staff member to actually recruit the technical college staff and administrators and the representative from the State Council on Vocational Technical Education. The program director at the technical college usually recruits the remainder of the team (i.e. students, instructors, advisory committee members, and employers). Once the program improvement team has been recruited and its composition determined, the names and addresses of the team members are submitted to the SBTC. Immediately, a SBTC

staff member sends a letter of confirmation to each member of the team along with a packet typically containing the following:

a) A nine page document titled *Program Review Guide for Focus Visits*. This guide describes the focus visit goals and processes and includes a form called the program improvement worksheet which the team members complete during the focus visit. Each team member is encouraged to read the *Program Review Guide* ahead of time and bring it with them to the focus visit.
b) A roster of the program improvement team.
c) An agenda for the focus visit.
d) A map providing a floor plan of the building and directions to the technical college.
e) Background information on the community, the technical college, the specific program under review, and the labor market for its graduates.

Below are two examples of the final composition of program improvement teams for two focus visits. One team is relatively small, consisting of fourteen members. The other is unusually large, consisting of twenty-nine members.

**Northwest Technical College–Thief River Falls Campus**
**Automotive Services Technology Program**
**May 15-16, 1995**

2 Faculty from the Automotive Services Technology Program at the Thief River Falls Campus of Northwest Technical College
1 Instructor from a similar program at a different institution
4 Additional staff and administrators from the Thief River Falls Campus including the Dean of Instruction, the Student Services Coordinator, the Support Services Coordinator, and the Placement Specialist
1 SBTC staff member
1 Representative from the State Council on Vocational Technical Education
2 Program advisory committee members
2 Employers of program graduates
1 Program graduate
14 TOTAL

**Dakota County Technical College**
**Autobody Repair/Body Service Educational Program**
**September 27, 1995**

4 Faculty members from the Autobody Repair/Body Service Education Program at Dakota County Technical College
7 Additional staff and administrators from Dakota County Technical College including the Dean of Instruction, the Dean of Student Services, an associate dean,

a counselor, a placement specialist, a recruiter, and the Communications Coordinator
2 Additional staff from other technical colleges including a placement specialist and a recruiter
1 SBTC staff member
1 Representative from the State Council on Vocational Technical Education
2 Instructors from similar programs at other institutions
5 Program advisory committee members, four of whom are also employers of program graduates
3 Current students
4 Former students
29 TOTAL

Prior to the focus visit, a staff member from the SBTC assigns the members of the program improvement team to one of four workgroups. During the focus visit each workgroup examines one specific aspect of the program. One workgroup studies support services. Another group examines the program's curriculum and instruction. The third group considers the facilities and equipment, and the fourth workgroup looks at placement and employment of its graduates. Some members of the program review team are assigned to workgroups closely matching that person's experience or area of expertise. Others—students or local employers—are often randomly assigned to a workgroup. In addition, the SBTC staff member selects a chair for each group.

## The Focus Visit

An entire focus visit can be conducted within one eight-hour working day. Some focus visits are completed in as few as six hours. In other cases, the focus visit team meets the evening before the actual focus visit for dinner, an overview of the focus visit process, and a presentation of information on the program being examined. Meeting the evening before allows team members to get acquainted with each other and with the focus visit process. As a result, the team can begin its mission without delay when the actual focus visit commences the next morning .

> ***"What I like best about the focus visit process is that it provides employers with an opportunity for input. It's not just a group of people from the state doing a corrective audit."***
>
> **Jerry Folstrom**
> **Vice President of Operations**
> **Northwest Technical College**

The format for conducting a focus visit varies slightly depending on whether it is completed in one day or begins with dinner the evening before. Agendas from two previous focus visits have been included in Appendix A. One agenda is from a focus visit which began

with dinner the evening before. The other agenda is from a focus visit which was completed in a single day.

Until now, an SBTC staff member has acted as the moderator for each focus visit, but this need not necessarily be the case in the future. In fact, it was always the vision of SBTC staff that individual technical colleges would eventually accept total ownership of the focus visit process and begin conducting them without the coordination of SBTC staff. When this does occur, the technical college's focus visit coordinator may be a good candidate for the moderator of the focus visit.

Although specific agendas vary from one focus visit to the next, the morning of a focus visit generally begins with a brief welcome from the technical college president. Following that, the focus visit moderator explains the overall purpose, as well as the undergirding philosophy of the focus visit process. Although this portion of the agenda usually takes only ten minutes to complete, it is crucial for establishing the tone of the focus visit. The moderator should emphasize that the focus visit is not intended to document all the problems and weaknesses of the program. Rather, the sole purpose of the focus visit is to find ways to make the program better. At a recent focus visit the moderator summarized this by saying: "This is not an inspection. Take off your white gloves. We are here today to focus all of our attention on improving the program" (Perry, 1995).

> ***"It is good that you invite people from industry to directly get our input without filtering it through some sort of committee. That way you know firsthand what we need in industry to do the jobs that are out there."***
>
> **Lyle Pagel**
> **Manager**
> **GM Training Center**

Next, the moderator explains briefly how the particular program being examined was selected for a focus visit. At this point, the moderator may wish to explain the three criteria used for selecting programs for focus visits—the mission, efficiency, and effectiveness tests. Any additional issues regarding the impetus for the focus visit are also discussed.

The moderator also discusses expectations regarding the final report submitted by the program improvement team at the end of the day. The team members are encouraged to focus their attention on a few major issues and not get bogged down with a host of secondary concerns. Consequently, the final report should be very succinct.

During the next portion of the agenda, the program faculty and technical college administrators provide the program improvement team with important background information on the program being examined. The information presented might include data such as trends in enrollment, placement, and expenditures. It is critically important that the instructors and administrators have their opportunity at



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this time to describe the problems and issues with which they feel they need help. This is consistent with the focus visit philosophy which assumes that the persons most closely involved with a program are the ones most likely to understand its strengths and weaknesses. In contrast, inherent in the compliance monitoring approach used prior to focus visits was a belief that out-of-town experts were better qualified to evaluate the program than the people who work directly with it. This portion of the agenda generally takes 15 to 30 minutes.

Following the general description of the program and discussion of possible issues by the staff, the moderator meets briefly with the chairs of the four workgroups: support services, curriculum and instruction, facilities and equipment, and placement and employment. The focus visit moderator and the workgroup chairs consider and come to an agreement on a strategy for conducting the work to be done by their groups. The workgroup chairs identify some critical issues that should be addressed in their workgroups based on the information just presented by the program faculty and college administrators. They are also given an opportunity to ask last minute questions before the workgroups convene. This part of the agenda takes approximately five to fifteen minutes.

The last part of the agenda before breaking into the workgroups is a tour and assessment of the program's facilities. This is especially important for the team members who have never had an opportunity to visit the facility. This tour and assessment is important for framing the context of the focus visit and anchoring it to the real-world situation in which it exists. The tour and assessment of the facilities is also important because one of the workgroups will specifically consider the equipment and facilities of the program. It should be emphasized that the tour is not an inspection. The program improvement team is in no way encouraged to check for misplaced materials or an untidy environment. Rather team members are encouraged to place themselves in the shoes of the students and faculty and consider how the facilities and equipment enhance or inhibit learning in the program. The tour may take anywhere from 15 to 90 minutes depending on the program. Touring and assessing the facilities for an accounting program would probably take less time than touring and assessing the facilities for a construction program. Furthermore, some programs require off-site tours requiring transportation for the program improvement team.

> ***"What makes focus visits so successful is the fact that you get to talk to all people involved with the program. Without focus visits there will be no way to help improve good programs that are having a little trouble and need some advice."***
>
> **Roger Weyer**
> **Carpentry Instructor**
> **St. Cloud Technical College**

Up until this point on the agenda the program improvement team has been together in one large group; after the tour the team members are divided into their respective workgroups. The majority of the time remaining is spent working in these groups. The first activities of the agenda are important for providing background and context

for the focus visit, but it is in workgroups that the actual work of the focus visit takes place. Each group is given a standard list of possible issues to address (see Appendix B). It is not possible for any of the workgroups to address all of the issues on their lists. That is why the workgroup chairs are encouraged to identify the salient issues in advance.

The workgroups meet twice. During the first session the workgroups focus on identifying the needs of the program. During the second session they focus on developing solutions to meet the most important of these needs. A special effort is made to treat all members of the group alike during these sessions. The comments of the group members are treated with equal respect regardless of whether they are students or college deans. During each session, one member of the group acts as a recorder. The recorder fills in a form called the Program Improvement Worksheet as the discussion evolves. A copy of the program improvement worksheet can be found in Appendix C.

During the first session, the workgroups concentrate on identifying needs in their respective areas (support services, curriculum and instruction, facilities and equipment, or placement and employment). The first session takes one to one-and-one-half hours to complete. The second session focuses on developing solutions and strategies for meeting those needs and requires an additional one to one-and-one-half hours. The final outcome of these discussions is a program improvement plan which is completed by each workgroup. An example of a completed program improvement plan can be found in Appendix D.

> ***"I really do think that focus visits are a good deal. I wish we would do more of them. They help programs get better. The more people you have giving ideas about a program, the better things are going to be."***
>
> **Herb Rose**
> **Carpentry Instructor**
> **Alexandria Technical College**

The discussion is somewhat unstructured during the first session. The group chair may simply launch the discussion on an issue by saying, "How are we doing in this area?" The second session is usually more task-oriented. The group chair focuses attention on the top three or four needs that were identified in the first session and leads the workgroup through a discussion of possible solutions for each need. This discussion includes developing specific strategies for implementing the solutions, an estimate of the cost for each solution, an estimate of the time needed to implement each solution, and identification of the most appropriately responsible for carrying out the solution. During the first session the group fills out the first column (Need) of the program improvement worksheet found in Appendix C. During the second session, the group fills out the other five columns of the program improvement worksheet (Solution, Strategy, Cost, Time, Responsibility).



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Another important component of the focus visit agenda is the student forum. The student forum often falls between the two workgroup sessions and is generally scheduled immediately after lunch. The entire program improvement team does not participate in the student forum, so scheduling it immediately after lunch gives the rest of the program improvement team an opportunity to visit with their fellow team members or take care of other business during their extended lunch break.

All of the students who are on the program improvement team are asked to participate in the student forum. Additional students from the program may also be recruited, but the program faculty as well as the college staff and administrators do not participate in this part of the agenda. Likewise, the SBTC staff member generally does not participate. This leaves the advisory committee members, the employers, the out-of-town guests, and the representative of the State Council on Vocational Technical Education to interact with the students during the student forum.

The purpose of the student forum is to give the students the opportunity to speak candidly concerning what they like and dislike about the program. The discussion is divided between institutional issues and issues related to the specific program being evaluated. The reason the college faculty, staff, and administrators do not participate in the student forum is to ensure that the students are not inhibited from being completely honest and forthright. A list of possible issues to be discussed in the student forum can be found in Appendix B. The student forum is generally given 45 minutes of agenda time.

> ***"One of the things that I remember about the focus visit I attended is that we spent time talking to the students. They gave us feedback about the program and they didn't feel intimidated because they knew they were not going to be reprimanded for it."***
>
> **Loren Larson**
> **Autobody Instructor**
> **Southwestern Technical College, Jackson Campus**

Once the student forum has been conducted and after the workgroups have met for both of their sessions and have completed their program improvement plans, the entire program improvement team meets for a large-group discussion. Each workgroup shares the highlights of their program improvement plans. Members of the other workgroups are encouraged to respond and comment. There is often a great deal of synergy during the large-group session because of similarities between the findings of workgroups. After each workgroup has reported on its program improvement plan, the members of the program improvement team who attended the student forum report on that session. The large-group discussion typically receives one hour on the agenda, but can be shortened if the focus visit is behind schedule.

Before the focus visit adjourns, every member of the focus visit team is asked to complete a one-page evaluation of the focus visit, as well as an expense report for any mileage and accommodation expenses incurred during the focus visit. A copy of



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the form used to evaluate focus visits is included in Appendix F. The evaluations are a means for continuously improving the focus visit process and its effectiveness. This last part of the agenda normally requires only 15 minutes.

The agenda for a typical focus visit is summarized in Table 2 on page 19. Please note that it is possible to conduct a focus visit in less than six hours. It is critical to consider carefully the needs and time constraints of the program improvement team while developing the agenda for a focus visit. It may be best to start the focus visit with lunch and finish in the evening for some program improvement teams. Meeting for dinner and a brief meeting the evening before a focus visit is generally a good idea, especially if the agenda requires more that eight hours, but some program improvement teams may not be able to commit that much time to the focus visit. No two agendas are alike. The key is to be flexible and build the agenda around the needs of the program improvement team.

**Table 2: Typical Focus Visit Agenda**

| Agenda Item | Minimum Hours | Maximum Hours |
|---|---|---|
| 1. Welcome and overview of the process | 0.25 | 0.50 |
| 2. Presentation of program information | 0.25 | 0.50 |
| 3. Meeting with workgroup chairs | 0.10 | 0.25 |
| 4. Tour and assessment of the program facilities | 0.25 | 1.50 |
| 5. First workgroup session | 1.00 | 1.50 |
| 6. Lunch | 0.75 | 0.75 |
| 7. Student forum | 0.75 | 0.75 |
| 8. Second workgroup session | 1.00 | 1.50 |
| 9. Large-group session | 1.00 | 1.00 |
| 10. Evaluation and expense reports | 0.25 | 0.25 |
| TOTAL | 5.85 | 8.50 |

# Following through with the Focus Visit

Within two weeks following the focus visit, staff from the SBTC compile the information from the four workgroups and the student forum and produce a single, comprehensive, typewritten plan for improving the program. A draft of this program improvement plan is sent to each member of the program improvement team for review and comment. The feedback received from the team is incorporated into the final version of the plan. Once the program improvement plan is finalized, a staff member from the SBTC meets with the college president to review and discuss the plan. The plan is modified, if necessary, and a commitment is sought from the college president regarding the resources required to carry out the plan. These meetings are generally quite fruitful. College presidents have demonstrated high levels of commitment to carrying out the program improvement plans, and the needs identified in these plans often receive high priority during subsequent college planning activities (Grovum, 1995).

Six months to one year following the focus visit, the SBTC assesses the results of the program improvement plan reflected by changes and improvements in the program. This is accomplished using a follow-up form completed by the college which describes the action taken thus far for each item on the program improvement plan. A copy of the form used for this assessment can be found in Appendix G. After the completed follow-up form is received by the SBTC, a staff member visits the school once again. In addition to discussing progress made on the program improvement plan, the staff member assesses the perception of college staff of how the focus visit affected the program—both positively and negatively. This feedback is also used for continuously improving the focus visit process.

Successful follow-through is dependent on much more than just the two meetings mentioned above, however. The real key to successful follow-through is making sure that the college develops a sense of ownership regarding the program improvement plan. The program faculty and the college staff and administration must embrace the plan and be personally committed to it. Lasting change is unlikely to occur if accountability to the SBTC is the primary motivation behind the follow-up. A sense of ownership is developed throughout the focus visit process as technical colleges choose their own focus visit coordinators, select their own focus visit committees, develop their own systems for assessing their programs, select the members of their program improvement teams, and design their own focus visit agendas.

# Reasons for the Success of Focus Visits

Through attendance of Council staff and Council members and interviews conducted during the preparation of this report, the State Council has identified at least six

reasons why focus visits have been so effective in improving technical college programs.

1. **The key stakeholders are involved in the focus visit process.** These stakeholders are the ones who care most deeply about the program and best understand the issues regarding it. They certainly understand these local issues better than a panel of out-of-town experts. They are also the ones who can and will do the most to change the program.

2. **Focus visits create a win/win situation for all parties involved.** The faculty win because they find new and creative ways of solving problems that could limit, or even shut down their program. The students win because they have an opportunity to voice their concerns and act as change agents in a non-threatening environment to help improve their program. The school as a whole also wins—placement specialists, recruiters, administrators, and staff from student services—all receive information which can help them better do their jobs. Finally, employers win. They have an opportunity to articulate current labor market needs, ensuring that the program remains relevant to their workplace.

3. **Focus visits concentrate on only a few salient issues.** The program improvement plan is concise, can be read quickly, and can be realistically implemented. Themes often emerge which cut across the four workgroups and the student forum. These common themes form the core of the program improvement plan. Secondary concerns are not included in the final plan.

4. **Focus visits are non-threatening.** Faculty consistently emerge from the focus visit process with a sense that the focus visit truly was intended to help their program, not threaten it. They end up seeing focus visits as an opportunity to engage in creative problem-solving with their most intimate stakeholders to improve their program in meaningful ways.

5. **Focus visits are cost effective.** Because a focus visit can be conducted with a team as small as ten people—most of whom are from the local area—the travel, food, and lodging expenses for a focus visit are relatively modest. In fact, the average cost to the SBTC for a focus visit is less than $1,000 (SBTC, 1994). The technical college hosting the focus visit usually pays for the lunch and refreshments for the focus visit, while the SBTC covers the expenses of travel and overnight accommodations.

6. **The process is based on real data.** The institutional assessment that precedes a focus visit is based on mission critical data that faculty, administrators, students, and employers can understand. What is gleaned from this data becomes the foundation of the program improvement plan. Therefore, changes in the data resulting from the focus visit can be quantified, and improvements in the program accruing from the focus visit will be evident.

# Vision for the Future

The vision for the future of focus visits is that technical colleges will embrace the process and take ownership of it. The hope is that technical colleges will eventually conduct focus visits completely on their own initiative, without prompting or assistance from MnSCU or any other state agency. Right now, only 13 of the 34 technical college campuses in Minnesota have had the opportunity for at least one focus visit (Perry, 1996). While there are a few campuses that have already demonstrated a commitment to continuing the focus visit process on their own, most of the 13 campuses that have had focus visits will require further assistance and guidance before they are ready to conduct their own focus visits.

It is also hoped that the spirit of process improvement which is inherent in the focus visit process will remain intact. Focus visits have spawned a new way of thinking about program evaluation. The emphasis has shifted from compliance monitoring to genuine concern about process improvement. As a result, there are cases where faculty from programs that were not struggling or in jeopardy of being shut down requested a focus visit because they realized it would help improve their programs. The imagery associated with program evaluation has shifted from a panel of out-of-town experts carrying clipboards and scrutinizing the faculty and facilities, to stakeholders who stand beside the faculty and collaborate with them to improve the program. The latter is refreshing, stimulating, and enjoyable. The former is frightening, disconcerting, and lends itself often to counterproductive behaviors.

# Recommendations

The State Council on Vocational Technical Education, in conjunction with the advisory committee for this project, makes the following two recommendations regarding focus visits.

1. **MnSCU should continue to support the focus visit initiative.** There are 21 technical college campuses that have not yet had an opportunity to have a focus visit. There are other campuses who have had one or two focus visits, but need technical assistance, or just some encouragement, to continue the process on their own. Although there may be a few campuses that will never embrace the focus visit process, many others may embrace it if they receive continued assistance. Staff from MnSCU should contact each technical college campus to ascertain the position of these schools regarding focus visits and their interest in receiving technical assistance from MnSCU.

2. **As technical colleges take ownership of the focus visit process they should be encouraged to modify it according to their own needs.** For instance, they should be encouraged to develop their own criteria for identifying which programs receive focus visits. They can continue to use the data collected routinely at the state level, but they should also be encouraged to collect their own data. In addition, they should be encouraged to determine the composition of their program improvement teams and establish their own agendas and follow-up procedures. The technical colleges would, however, be wise to consider carefully the activities that have worked well consistently in previous focus visits.

# Position Statement

WHEREAS the focus visit process is perceived throughout the state as a positive effort,

WHEREAS the focus visit process is a proven tool for improvement,

WHEREAS the focus visit process is implemented as a non-threatening process at the level closest to implementation,

WHEREAS the focus visit process promotes effectiveness, benchmarking, and measurement,

WHEREAS the focus visit process requires additional re-work for wider based application and acceptance,

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the State Council on Vocational Technical Education will offer its resources and expertise to MnSCU as a partner to initiate the re-engineering of the focus visit process into a process improvement model for site-based implementation.

Signed _____
President, Minnesota State Council on Vocational Technical Education

Dated 10/14/96

# Appendix A

## Sample Agendas for Focus Visits

MINNESOTA STATE COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

PROGRAM REVIEW FOCUS VISIT SCHEDULE

DAKOTA COUNTY TECHNICAL COLLEGE
1300 EAST 145TH STREET - ROSEMOUNT, MN 55068

AUTO BODY REPAIR AND BODY SERVICE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM

| Wednesday, September 27, 1995 | | Location |
|---|---|---|
| 7:30 a.m. - 8:00 a.m. | Continental Breakfast | Rm 1-306A & B |
| 8:00 a.m. - 8:10 a.m. | Welcome and Information<br>David Schroeder, President | Rm 1-306A & B |
| 8:10 a.m. - 8:30 a.m. | Purpose and Expectations of Focus Visit Team<br>Dayton Perry | Rm 1-306A & B |
| 8:30 a.m. - 8:45 a.m. | Program Information<br>Jerry J. Johnson - Dean<br>Ron McKeever - Associate Dean<br>Ray Swedeen - Instructor | Rm 1-306A &B |
| 8:45 a.m. - 9:00 a.m. | Meeting with Team Chairs | Rm 1-306A & B |
| 9:00 a.m. - 9:30 a.m. | Tour Program Facilities<br>All Team Members | |
| 9:30 a.m. - 9:45 a.m. | BREAK | |
| 9:45 a.m. - 10:45 a.m. | Teams Discussion of Program Needs | Rm 1-306A & B |
| 10:45 a.m. - 11:30 a.m. | Student Forum - Select Group | Student Services Conference Room |
| 11:30 a.m. - 12:15 p.m. | LUNCH | Rainbow Room |
| 12:15 p.m. - 1:45 p.m. | Teams Meet to Complete Program Improvement Plan | Rm 1-306A&B |
| 1:45 p.m. - 2:45 p.m. | Teams Share Program Needs | Rm 1-306A& B |
| 2:45 p.m. - 3:00 p.m. | Evaluation of the Process and Expense Reports | Rm 1-306A & B |
| 3:00 p.m. | ADJOURN | |

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## STATE BOARD OF TECHNICAL COLLEGES

# TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOCUS VISIT SCHEDULE

**NORTHWEST TECHNICAL COLLEGE-THIEF RIVER FALLS CAMPUS**
**1301 Highway One East, Thief River Falls, Minnesota 56701**
**218/681-5424**

### Automotive Service Technology

**Monday,May 15, 1995**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 5:30 p.m. or before | Hotel Check-In | Best Western Inn |
| 6:00 - 7:00 p.m. | Dinner | |
| | Introduction & Welcome<br>Purpose of Focus Visit | Dayton, Perry, Director MTCS |
| 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. | Process for Visitation | Dayton Perry<br>Evaluation MTCS |
| | Background Information College/Community<br>(Region and Institution) | Dr. Orley Gunderson<br>President |
| | Program Information/Overview | Norman Halsa, Instructor<br>Duane Brown, Instructor |
| 8:00 - 9:00 p.m. | Team Meetings, Assignments<br>and Logistics | Dayton Perry, Director<br>Evaluation MTCS |
| 9:00 - Time Out | Adjournment | |

| **Tuesday, May 16, 1995** | | **Location** |
|---|---|---|
| 7:30 - 8:00 a.m. | Continental Breakfast | Room 131 |
| 8:00 - 8:15 a.m. | Welcome & Comments<br>Dr. Orley Gunderson, President | Room 131 |
| 8:15 - 11:30 a.m. | Tour Program Facilities, Review<br>Information and Discuss Components<br>Draft Needs | Room 131 |
| 11:30 - 12:15 p.m. | Lunch | Cafeteria |
| 12:15 - 1:00 p.m. | Student Forum | Room 131 |
| 1:00 - 2:30 p.m. | Team Discussion of Needs | Room 131 |
| 2:30 - 3:30 p.m. | Writing Improvement Plan | Room 131 |
| 3:30 - 4:00 p.m. | Evaluation of the Process and Expenses | Room 131 |
| 4:00 p.m. | Adjournment | |

# Appendix B

## Lists of Potential Issues to be Discussed in the Workgroups

## Support Services Team

**This team is charged with reviewing the student opinion survey regarding Support Services, interviewing students enrolled in the program and discussing/documenting potential issues in which services might be improved.**

**Discussion issues might include:**

- **Admission**
- **Recruiting and marketing strategies**
- **Brochures and application forms**
- **Counseling and advising procedures**
- **Assessment/testing, counseling and placement recommendations**
- **Student information and orientation**
- **Financial Aid and work/study**
- **Career planning assistance, scheduling, electives**
- **Remedial assistance**
- **Support groups**
- **Housing and child care**
- **Personal counseling and students assigned**
- **public agency assistance and referral**
- **Attendance policy and grade point average**
- **Transportation**
- **Student Senate**
- **Records required for admission, transfers, graduation**
- **Student assessment/feedback about services**
- **Student expectation, policies and conduct**
- **Advocacy for students' rights**
- **Retention strategies/procedures**
- **Health insurance, safety**
- **Grievance procedures**
- **Other services (fees, placement procedures, follow-up, image, transcripts)**

Curriculum/Instruction Team

**This team will focus on curriculum content and its relevancy to current technical training and education and labor market needs.**

**Discussion issues and opportunities for improvement might include:**

- **Curriculum guide**
- **Course syllabus**
- **Goals and objectives**
- **Grading procedures**
- **Curriculum modifications process**
- **General education requirements**
- **Technical and remedial courses**
- **Instructional aides - computers, overheads, etc.**
- **Tutorial assistance**
- **Course sequence**
- **Availability of courses**
- **Curriculum evaluation/validation**
- **Credentialing/certification of staff**
- **Students' opinions of instruction**
- **Employers' opinions of graduates**
- **Advisory committee input**
- **Program awards or recognition**
- **Internship or clinical documentation**
- **Instructor upgrading**
- **Guest instructors, field trips**
- **Shadowing or mentoring**
- **Student assessment/testing/outplacement/transfer**
- **Professional/business/trade journals and publications**

## Facilities/Equipment Team

**The facilities team will focus its effort on appropriate equipment and facilities that enhance learning and model the business community.**

**Discussion issues might include:**

- **Program area promotes learning**
- **Standard equipment for instruction**
- **Comparable to industry standards**
- **Rental or lease program for equipment**
- **Replacement schedule for equipment**
- **Using advisory committee recommendations**
- **Consistence with curriculum and instruction**
- **Area is sufficient for the number of students (classroom and lab)**
- **Maintenance plan for equipment**
- **Appropriate facilities and equipment for students enrolled**
- **Safety and security procedures**
- **Classroom and/or lab - space and decor**
- **Disposal and storage space**
- **Employers' donations to the program**
- **Heating and lighting**

## Placement/Employment Team

**This team will focus on placement procedures, employment opportunities and potential employers.**

**Discussion issues might include:**

- **Student expectations**
- **Staff expectations and responsibilities**
- **Placement office assistance and procedures**
- **Information students receive on: wages**
  **labor market outlook**
  **potential employers**
  **previous graduate class placement**
- **Resume and interview techniques**
- **Early notification of potential employers**
- **Advisory committee role in placement and labor market**
- **Labor market demand**
- **Number of potential employers**
- **Willingness of students to relocate**
- **Employer contact with instructor concerning needed qualifications**
- **Employer contact with instructor concerning job openings**
- **Reporting student placement**
- **Employer assessment of graduate performance**
- **Job development procedures**

## Student Forum Format

**Purpose:**

**To obtain feedback from students as to what they like about the college/program and identify areas that can be improved.**

- **Ask students to introduce themselves and state one reason for attending the college.**
- **Ask the students to state some of the positive things they like about the program.**
- **Ask the students to state some of the areas in which the program could be improved.**

**Optional Discussion Items:**

**Institutional**

- **Child Care**
- **Housing**
- **Registration**
- **Course Information**
- **Program Offering at Convenient Times**
- **Evening or Weekend Classes**
- **Counseling**
- **Information**
- **Safety**
- **Car Starting**
- **Emergency Funding Source**
- **Agency Service**
- **Access to Administration**
- **Climate (not temperature)**
- **Harassment**
- **Tutorial Assistance**
- **Library**
- **Equipment**
- **Grading**
- **Placement**
- **sports Activities**
- **Parking**
- **Smoking**
- **Food Services**
- **Help**
- **Transportation**
- **Placement/ Information Assistance**
- **Tutorial Assistance**

**Program**

- **Course Requirements/Information**
- **Assignments or Expectations**
- **Course Content/Sequence**
- **Instructional Delivery Methods**
- **Grading for Projects/Performance**
- **Attendance**
- **Verbal or Written Assignments**
- **Equipment/Tools**
- **Advising**
- **classroom Environment**
- **Availability of Instructor(s)**
- **Diversity of Students**
- **Testing/Assessment**
- **Student Respect**
- **Concern with Problems or Performance**
- **Time Courses Offered**
- **Employment Outlook and Assistance**
- **Internship or Clinical Experience**
- **Clothing**
- **Orientation/Information about Program Requirements**
- **Make-ups for Tests and Exams**
- **Lab time and Lab Costs**
- **Project Assignment**
- **Study Groups**
- **Employer Expectations and Conduct**

# Appendix C

## Blank Program Improvement Worksheet

# MINNESOTA TECHNICAL COLLEGE SYSTEM

Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 (612) 297-5264

## PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN

**Technical College:** **Program:** **Date of Visit:**

**Team:**
*(Curriculum / Instructon, etc.)*

| Needs | Solution | Strategy | Cost | Time | Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | | |
| | | | | | |
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# Appendix D

## Sample of a Completed Program Improvement Worksheet

Minnesota Technical College System

Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 (612) 297-5264

**PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

Sample

**Technical College:** Winona Campus
Red Wing/Winona Technical College

**Program:** Composites Technology Curriculum

**Date of Visit:** February 9, 1994

**Team:** Tom Girts, Ron Hawley, Scott Tjossen, Keith Dennehy

| Needs | Solution | Strategy | Cost | Time | Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Formulate colored plastics into target products. | Meet industry's expectation of graduates | -Incorporate into curriculum<br>-Visit industrial sites | -0- | Fall 1995 | Instructor<br>Dean of Curriculum<br>Curriculum Committee |
| 2. Introduce students to the use of coordinated measuring machines (CMM). | Meet industry's expectation of graduates | -Teach a unit on CMM | -0- | Fall 1995 | Instructor<br>Dean of Curriculum<br>Curriculum Committee |
| 3. Provide students with experience/training in tearing down and maintaining equipment. | Meet industry's expectation of graduate | -Establish trouble shooting demo site/projects<br>-Create a unit on maintenance of equipment | -0- | Fall 1995 | Instructor<br>Dean of Curriculum<br>Curriculum Committee |
| 4. Introduce students to different materials used in moldmaking. | Meet industry's expectation of graduates | -Student research assignment<br>-Classroom presentations<br>-Use industry materials | -0- | Fall 1995 | Instructor<br>Dean of Curriculum<br>Curriculum Committee |
| 5. Periodically review practices of students handling hazardous materials. | Meet industry's expectation of graduates | Establish certification course requirements for graduates in forklift operations | -0- | Fall 1995 | Instructor<br>Dean of Curriculum<br>Curriculum Committee |
| 6. Provide students with training and certification of forklift operations. | Meet industry's expectation of graduates | Review course content to include colored plastics | -0- | Fall 1995 | Instructor<br>Dean of Curriculum<br>Curriculum Committee |

# Appendix E

## Sample of a Finished Program Improvement Plan (A compilation of the program improvement worksheets from each of the workgroups)

Minnesota Technical College System

Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 (612) 297-5264

# SUMMARY PLAN

**Technical College:** Northwest Technical College Detroit Lakes Campus

**Program:** Bio-Medical Equipment Technician Curriculum

**Date of Visit:** April 13, 1994

**Team:** Robert Dobrenski, James Hedlund, Ralph Segarra, Deborah Hoxmeier-Schweigert, Dave Pederson

| Needs | Solution | Strategy | Cost | Time | Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Incorporate employment test into curriculum | To enhance and expose students employer hiring procedures | -Develop test taking procedures and incorporate into curriculum | $125 | Spring 1994 | Instructor |
| 2. College/program should subscribe for membership to SBET Society of Bio-Medical Tech and NCBA (North Central BioMed Assoc and American Society of Hospital Engineers | Membership will provide reliable technical resources and information | -Subscribe to SBET, ASHE, and NCBA membership | $220 | Spring 1994 | Instructor |
| 3. Review and update technical syllabi after first year's alignment operation | Assess the effectiveness of alignment process | -Review each content goal statement for relevancy | - | - | Instructor and Advisory Committee |
| 4. Review/evaluate the appropriateness of the internship program as a required course | To determine its effectiveness and practical application of internship for graduation | -Review with Advisory Committee members<br>-Discuss with students and administration | $200 | February 1995 | Instructor, Advisory Committee, and students |
| 5. Enhance students interview skills and shorten the paperwork required for internships | To help prepare students for competitive market and minimize employers paper processing | -Discuss with Advisory Committee<br>-Obtain feedback from students and employers | $700 | Fall 1994 | Instructor, Advisory Committee, and Academic Affairs Committee |

# Minnesota Technical College System

Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 (612) 297-5264

## SUMMARY PLAN

**Technical College:** Northwest Technical College Detroit Lakes Campus

**Program:** Bio-Medical Equipment Technician Curriculum

**Date of Visit:** April 13, 1994

**Team:** Robert Dobrenski, James Hedlund, Ralph Segarra, Deborah Hoxmeier-Schweigert, Dave Pederson

| Needs | Solution | Strategy | Cost | Time | Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. Strengthen schematic interpretative drawing ability of first year students | To better prepare students for second year assignments | -Discuss with NTC-Wadena<br>-Obtain additional feedback from students/Advisory Committee members | - | Fall 1994 | Vice President and Instructor |
| 7. Establish procedures to assist students in researching company background information | To prepare for interviews | -Student research assignments<br>-Applied Studies Committee | - | - | Students, instructor, and Vice President |

Minnesota Technical College System

Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 (612) 297-5264

# SUMMARY PLAN

**Technical College:** Northwest Technical College
Detroit Lakes Campus

**Program:** Bio-Medical Equipment Technician
Facilities

**Date of Visit:** April 13, 1994

**Team:** Chuck Paulson, Steve Kaiser, Harvey Olson, Phillip Gill, Ken Temple

| Needs | Solution | Strategy | Cost | Time | Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Replace current and second generation medical equipment | To ensure training on modern up-to-date equipment used in industry | -Purchase<br>-Secure donation<br>-Request Advisory Committee input | $25,000 to $50,000 | Yearly | Instructor, Advisory Committee, and administration |
| 2. Provide state of the art medical equipment, i.e. testers and analyzers | To provide students with opportunity to compete for job openings | -Contact: Advisory Committee, vendors, manufacturers, other bio-medical groups | $5,000 | Yearly | Instructor |
| 3. Provide a "white board" and cry marker for classroom | To reduce dust and maintenance | -Purchase | $200 to $300 | ASAP | Administration |
| 4. Provide a "bottle type" eye washer station | To enhance safety condition | -Meet OSHA requirements | $100 | ASAP | Administration |
| 5. Purchase new stools for new benches | Enhance decor of area | Purchase | $175 X 6 per stool | ASAP | Administration |

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# Minnesota Technical College System

Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 (612) 297-5264

## SUMMARY PLAN

**Technical College:** Northwest Technical College Detroit Lakes Campus **Program:** Bio-Medical Equipment Technician Facilities **Date of Visit:** April 13, 1994

**Team:** Chuck Paulson, Steve Kaiser, Harvey Olson, Phillip Gill, Ken Temple

| Needs | Solution | Strategy | Cost | Time | Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 6. Maintain separate lab, classroom, and storage area | To maintain learning environment | -Appearance and image | - | - | Administration |

7. Additional Comments:

A. Increase or improve air flow to office area

B. Orientation course on OSHA, Worker's Comp, hazard materials, lock-out/tag-out, blood bourn path, and other mandated regulations on first day in building.

C. Standardized PM procedure writing to ensure that consistency in lab participation and experience. (Document writing?) Service manual review to determine procedures.

D. Inventory existing medical teaching equipment to ensure that manuals and accessories are available to the students on this equipment (this could be a work-study project).

Minnesota Technical College System

Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 (612) 297-5264

# SUMMARY PLAN

**Technical College:** Northwest Technical College Detroit Lakes Campus

**Program:** Bio-Medical Equipment Technician Support Services

**Date of Visit:** April 13, 1994

**Team:** Shirley Schurman, Darrick Close, William Beck, Dave Fashant, Ann Wood

| Needs | Solution | Strategy | Cost | Time | Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. More in-depth advisor-advisee communication pertaining to job availability | a) Information needs to be shared about jobs outside Midwest region | Inform student services staff about current trends for job availability | None | Summer 1994 | Student Services |
| 2. More focus in job opportunities other than "hospital" oriented positions | Make more contacts with people in the service area | a) Have service oriented personnel on Staff Advisory Committee<br>b) Full time job placement personnel to search out related opportunities | None<br>Variable | Summer 1994<br>Fall 1994 | Instructor<br>Administration |
| 3. Grievance procedure needs to be clarified | a) Policy needs to be reviewed and clarified with staff | a) Discuss with student services staff<br>b) Consider adding appeals council for general issues | None<br>None | Summer 1994<br>Fall 1994 | Student Services<br>Administration and Student Services |
| 4. Transportation for first year courses is a major concern that needs to be improved | a) Look at more effective and systematic car pooling | 1) Look at more organized car pooling<br>2) Registration packet for car pooling<br>3) Look at ride share<br>4) Contract for costs--possibly take out of financial aid<br>5) Detroit Lakes should look at contracting with their own buses | None<br>None<br>None<br>None<br>Variable | Fall 1994<br>Fall 1994<br>Fall 1994<br>Fall 1994<br>Fall 1994 | Student Services<br>Students Services<br>Students Services<br>Financial Aid/Students Services<br>Administration |

# Minnesota Technical College System

Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 (612) 297-5264

## SUMMARY PLAN

**Technical College:** Northwest Technical College — Detroit Lakes Campus
**Program:** Bio-Medical Equipment Technician — Support Services
**Date of Visit:** April 13, 1994
**Team:** Shirley Schurman, Darrick Close, William Beck, Dave Fashant, Ann Wood

| Needs | Solution | Strategy | Cost | Time | Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 5. Housing and child care is inadequate for students | Provide information the best you can as to availability | a) Consider student housing near the school--dorms and apartments | Variable | - | Administration |
| | | b) Look at flexible hours for late afternoon and evenings for child care | None | - | Student Services |
| | | c) Have updated list of licensed day care providers | None | Fall 1994 | Students Services |
| 6. Students need information about part time employment in the area | Provide more information about employment for part time jobs in the school and town | a) Have student accessible job board which is updated frequently | | Fall 1994 | Administration, Student Services, and Placement |
| | | b) Advertise to the town that a job board is available for advertising. Tell employers who to contact | Minimal | Fall 1994 and ongoing | Placement personnel |
| 7. Need more customer feedback on quality of education | Contact employers who hire grads from the program and former students of the program | a) Obtain feedback from employers of graduate students | Minimal | Fall 1994 | Instructor |
| | | b) Panel of students who have been out for a year or two | | Fall 1994 | Instructor |
| 8. Lack of knowledge of Student Services staff | Provide centrally located information center for Student Services staff | a) Provide picture and information about each counseling staff in student accessible staff | - | Fall 1994 | Student Services |

# Minnesota Technical College System

Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 (612) 297-5264

## SUMMARY PLAN

**Technical College:** Northwest Technical College Detroit Lakes Campus
**Program:** Bio-Medical Equipment Technician Placement
**Date of Visit:** April 13, 1994
**Team:** Ken Schumacher, Marlys Ortlepp, Scott Sobolik, Pat Johnson

| Needs | Solution | Strategy | Cost | Time | Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Assess and clarify placement procedures, responsibilities, and expectations | To ensure opportunities for students | Combine part-time positions to a full time selling product (students) to industry | None | Fall 1994 | CEO and President |
| 2. Employer data base needed to identify potential employers | Expand employer for students | Share data base with all six campuses on one data base by computer | $2,500 | Spring 1995 | Placement |
| 3. Employee safety on the job needs to be strengthened | Awareness of OSHA and JCAHO regulations | Instructor make students aware of possible hazards | None | - | Instructor |
| 4. Reality expectations of students need to be discussed and clarified | On recruitment and class year reality checks | Include instructor with personal visit, phone call, letter, and job search areas | $500 | - | Instructor |
| 5. Provide a flow from lecture to application between classroom and lab experience | To provide consistency and application between discussion and practice | Schedule lab experience on assignment immediately after lecture | None | Fall 1994 | Instructor |
| 6. Provide employer information to students | Panel of employers to present job search expectations | Arrange for employers to present | None | Winter 1995 | Placement Officer |
| 7. Establish board to post job openings | Put up new boards | Survey to find traffic patterns of students--locate tow boards and one in classroom (already there) | $500 | Winter 1994 | Vice President |

# Minnesota Technical College System

Capitol Square Building, 550 Cedar Street
St. Paul, Minnesota 55101 (612) 297-5264

## SUMMARY PLAN

**Technical College:** Northwest Technical College Detroit Lakes Campus
**Program:** Bio-Medical Equipment Technician Placement
**Date of Visit:** April 13, 1994

**Team:** Ken Schumacher, Marlys Ortlepp, Scott Sobolik, Pat Johnson

| Needs | Solution | Strategy | Cost | Time | Responsibility |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 8. Conduct employers interview on campus | Employers offer interviews for students on campus | Arrange for room, time slots, students, and company | None | Spring 1995 | Placement |
| 9. Employment information needed by students | Brochures, etc., on file and available for students | Contact companies for information | Postage and time | Begin Fall 1994 | Placement |
| 10. Students need to learn how to research a company's background | Teach how to research company's and networking | Class syllabus and teach students where to look for and use research information for job search | None | - | Add to syllabi<br>Applied class on career information |

ON-SITE EVALUATION

April 13, 1994

Northwest Technical College

Reasons for student enrollment

Career change
Prospect of a job
Lateral move
Lateral move, possible advancement in bio-med
Convenience

Student's comments and concerns

Safety course provides good background in safety
Students understand that Jim is a new instructor and Jim has been doing his best
Financial assistance is very good
Placement information is vague, did not know of placement office
Students are willing to research information for employment
Jim should coordinate lecture with the lab, that is lab activity should be for lecture topic
Should update computers, computer programs are outdated
Should have more computer-skills courses
Too many students for the amount of computers available
Jim offers open-door policy for student concerns
Some students are willing to relocate for jobs
One student was concerned that there is little opportunity or time available for physical fitness
Students feel more lab equipment needed in lab

# Appendix F

## Copy of the Focus Visit Evaluation Form (Completed by the program improvement team at the end of the focus visit)

Minnesota Technical College System

PROGRAM REVIEW FOCUS VISIT- THIEF RIVER FALLS CAMPUS

Automotive Program - May 15-16, 1995

**Evaluation Form**

| *Check one:* *Instructor___ Student___ Employer___ Advisory member___ Administration___* | *Rating Scale: 1=Poor 2=Below Average 3=Average 4=Above Average 5=Excellent* |
|---|---|
| I. Timeliness of request to serve. Comments: | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| II. Amount of time to perform the task. Comments: | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| III. Orientation to the task. Comments: | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| IV. Expectation of participants. Comments: | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| V. Program materials/information. Comments: | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| VI. Discussion time to complete the task. Comments: | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| VII. Time and instructions for report. Comments: | 1 2 3 4 5 |

# Appendix G

## Form for the Six-Month Follow-Up Report

# Program Improvement Plan

## Focus Visit Date

**College**_____ **Progress Report**_____

**Campus**_____ **Progress Report**_____

**Program**_____ **Progress Report**_____

| Action Needed | Action Taken/Achieved | Completion Date |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

# Appendix H

## Advisory Committee for the Focus Visit Report

## Advisory Committee for the Focus Visit Report

Mr. Eric C. Crane, Research Fellow, State Council on Vocational Technical Education, St. Paul

Ms. Brenda M. Dillon, Executive Director, State Council on Vocational Technical Education, St. Paul

Dr. Jerry J. Johnson, Dean of Instruction, Dakota County Technical College, Rosemount

Dr. Mel Johnson, Vice-Chancellor of System Improvement Services (retired), State Board of Technical Colleges, St. Paul

Ms. Karen Kedrowski, Management Analyst, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, St. Paul

Mr. Dayton Perry, Director of Accreditation and Evaluation, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, St. Paul

Ms. Ann Wood, Management Analyst, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities, St. Paul

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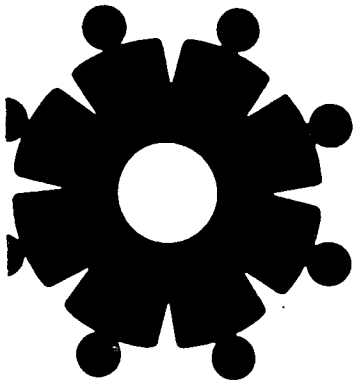

*The logo of the State Council on Vocational Technical Education is an abstract representation of the citizen-councilors assembled at a round table. Designed by a commercial art student at Alexandria Technical College, the design was selected in 1982 from 69 entries submitted by vocational students in Minnesota's high schools, secondary cooperative centers, and technical colleges. The Council made its selection on the basis of a recommendation by a panel of representatives from the graphic arts, public relations, and media industries in Minnesota.*

# Purpose of the Council

The State Council on Vocational Technical Education is designed to further public-private collaboration for the advancement of quality vocational programs responsive to labor market needs. Established in 1969 and designated as a state agency in 1985, the Council comprises 13 members appointed by the Governor. Seven members represent the private sector interests of agriculture, business, industry, and labor. Six of the members represent vocational technical education institutions, career guidance and counseling organizations, special education, and targeted populations.

The Council advises the Governor, the State Board of Technical Colleges, the State Board of Education, the Governor's Job Training Council, the business community, the general public, and the U.S. Secretaries of Education and Labor. The Council advises on development of the annual state vocational plan; provides consultation on the establishment of program evaluation criteria and state technical committees; analyzes the spending distribution and the availability of vocational programs, services, and activities; reports on the extent to which equity to quality programs is provided targeted populations; recommends procedures to enhance public participation in vocational technical education; recommends improvements that emphasize business and labor concerns; evaluates the delivery systems assisted under the Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act and the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA); and advises on policies that the state should pursue to strengthen vocational technical education, as well as initiatives that the private sector could undertake to enhance program modernization.

To enhance effectiveness in gathering information, the Council holds at least one town meeting each year at which the public is encouraged to express its concern about vocational technical education in Minnesota. To enhance its effectiveness in providing information, the Council publishes a quarterly newsletter, an annual directory, and a biennial report. These publications as well as project and activity reports are available to the public.

Information on the date, time, and location of meetings and other activities is available by calling the Council Offices at 612/296-4202.

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